
PRESS RELEASE

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SCAG URGES DECLARATION OF AIR QUALITY EMERGENCY FOR SOUTH COAST AIR BASIN

Los Angeles – The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) took bold steps today to bring together federal, state and local leaders in an effort to address the region's mounting air quality crisis. In reaction to the growing crisis, SCAG's Regional Council adopted a strong resolution urging the federal and state governments to take emergency actions while detailing a series of steps that SCAG intends to undertake to help resolve the matter.

The South Coast Air Basin – which includes portions of Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties and all of Orange County – has long been a non-attainment area for federal ozone and fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), one of the primary pollutants associated with diesel emissions. As the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) has been developing its 2007 Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP), however, a stark crisis began to unfold.

Southern California is the nation's primary gateway for the movement of goods and reaps tremendous economic benefits from hosting the nation's two largest ports and an ever-growing logistics industry. However, the region is also paying a high price in terms of the air pollution produced by these activities. A recent study conducted by the California Air Resources Board (ARB) indicates that the South Coast Air Basin suffers approximately 5,400 premature deaths, 2,400 hospitalizations, 140,000 cases of asthma and 980,000 lost work hours each year as a result of exposure to diesel-related pollution. Residents living in the South Coast Air Basin are exposed to 82% of the state-wide exposure and 52% of the national exposure of PM_{2.5} above the federal standard. One of the primary emission sources of PM_{2.5} in the region are goods movement activities from heavy duty diesel trucks, locomotives and ocean going vessels.

Identifying solutions to this daunting challenge is further complicated by the fact that approximately 80 percent of the emissions associated with these pollutants are not under the subject of local control. Rather, they remain under the sole jurisdiction of the US Environmental Protection Agency and the California Air Resources Board.

SCAG, which has responsibility for preparing the regional transportation strategy and control measures associated with the AQMP, recognized that even with strict controls on emission sources, the Basin was going to fall significantly short of attaining the federal health-based PM_{2.5} standard.

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“We will be moving forward with an aggressive effort to bring together federal and state leaders to address this very serious health crisis we face,” said San Bernardino County Supervisor and incoming SCAG President Gary Ovitt. “As SCAG President, as well as a member of the AQMD Board, I will bring these two organizations together and build consensus on the best approaches to address one of the most serious health challenges we face as a region today.”

“Without drastic efforts to stem PM2.5 through the implementation of clean freight initiatives and other control measures, PM2.5 will not only continue to contribute to premature deaths but mobilize residents against any future infrastructure expansion,” said SCAG Executive Director Mark Pisano. “The time to act is now, and I strongly urge our partners in Washington and Sacramento to recognize the seriousness of this air quality and public health crisis and act immediately.”

The resolution adopted by the Regional Council outlined a series of SCAG’s action steps, including:

- Urge the Governor and the President to declare the existing conditions in Southern California a state and national emergency
- Convene of a summit involving congressional and state legislative representatives, regulatory agencies and community stakeholders to engage political actions to address the emergency
- Prepare and advocate for federal and state legislation to resolve the crisis, consistent with SCAG’s policy, such as:
 - allowing stricter enforcement of the Clean Air Act
 - mitigating the health impacts of emissions associated to ports and goods movement activities
 - instituting controls on emissions from ocean-going vessels
 - providing innovative financing to fund high-capacity truck lanes and high speed/clean train technology
 - permitting regional airports to levy landing fees based on aircraft emissions
- Work with AQMD and ARB to vigorously pursue all available options to reduce diesel emissions
- Develop a legal strategy to more effectively address the crisis under federal and state laws
- Pursue all actions associated with implementation of an alternative clean freight movement system